

ROSETTA PAMPANINI

ROCOCO NO.5384

- Side 1.
1. NOZZE DI FIGARO: Voi che sapete (Mozart)
 2. FAUST: Il était un roi...Ah! Je ris de me voir (Gounod)
(in Italian)
 3. MADAMA BUTTERFLY: Un bel di (Puccini)
 4. WALLY: Ebben ne andrò (Catalani)
 5. OTELLO: Willow song (Verdi)
 6. IRIS: Un di (ero piccina) (Mascagni)

- Side 2.
1. GIULIANO: La nenia del vago usignolo (Zandonai)
 2. MARISTELLA: Uno strano senso arcano (Pietri)
 3. MARISTELLA: Alla mia casa (Pietri)
 4. La Danza (Rossini)
 5. O sole mio (Di Capua), unpublished
 6. Rondine al nido (De Crescenzo), unpublished
 7. Core 'ngrato (Cordiferro), unpublished
 8. La Girometta (Sibella), unpublished
 9. MADAMA BUTTERFLY: Con onor (Puccini), 1954, with
short talk before and after the aria.

ROSETTA PAMPANINI (1896-1973).

Somehow lyric sopranos generally receive less publicity than their coloratura and dramatic colleagues. Yet really great exponents of this vocal type are paradoxically rarer than either of their publicised sisters. It is true that the world contains innumerable more Mimi's and Nedda's than Norma's and Lucia's, but just this fact means that it is exceedingly difficult not to get lost in the shuffle and to stick out. In our time this is done by Mirella Freni, and before her by Victoria de los Angeles. The most famous Italian soprano lirico of the 1920's was Rosetta Pampanini. We are fortunate indeed that so many records exist to bear witness to her greatness.

She was born in Milan, 2nd September, 1896; she studied with Emma Molajoli, a renowned teacher and the wife of the conductor Lorenzo Molajoli. This was our luck, as Maestro Molajoli was the artistic director of the Italian Columbia branch and, of course, favoured his wife's pupils (two of them were the coloratura Nunu Sanchioni and the tenor Giovanni Voyer). On the other hand Pampanini seems to have wanted to prove she could start her recording career without this protection, as her first records were made for Fonotipia, and it was only after this engagement that she joined Columbia.

She made her debut in April, 1920, at the Teatro Nazionale of Rome, as Micaela in "Carmen". This was a try-out, and followed by a further period of studies, and then a second debut in February, 1921, as Siebel in "Faust" at the Teatro Regio of Turin, under Tullio Serafin. In 1922 she sang her first "Bohème" in Biella, but surprisingly not yet as Mimi, but as Musetta. This she really regarded as her official debut. After appearances in Trieste (still in the repertoire of the so-called lirico-leggiero), she obtained a great success as Desdemona in Modena, whereupon Serafin, remembering his promising Siebel, called her to the San Carlo in Naples where she created an opera "Colomba" by Nicoló van Westerhout. Next came her first Iris, in Novara, which so impressed Mascagni that he engaged her for this role under his own direction in Catania, and then in Bergamo, where she was heard by Toscanini and by Emma Carelli (then director of the Rome opera). Both had specially travelled North in order to test the new soprano. Her first Mimi seems to have been in Bologna, one month after Ruccini's death, i.e. in December, 1924.

After this the list of her Italian engagements would fill pages, with appearances in Padua, Modena, Catania, Genoa, Livorno, Bergamo, and finally on 29th November, 1925, her debut at La Scala as Butterfly, under Toscanini himself. And this was not just a routine performance. After the disastrous premiere of 1904 with Rosina Storchio, Puccini had withdrawn his work for revision, and then declared that as long as he lived he would not allow this opera to be given at La Scala again. Therefore it was only to commemorate the first anniversary of Puccini's death that Toscanini gave the second Scala premiere of "Butterfly", after a lapse of 21 years. That he chose Pampanini for the protagonist, the role which had once been created by his great personal friend Storchio, proves how high his opinion was of Pampanini. She had not sung the role before and was specially coached by Toscanini, so that it is small wonder this became her greatest role. Luckily she made a complete recording of it in 1929, which in my opinion is by far the finest complete interpretation of the role we have on records. Unfortunately only a highlights was issued on LP, which destroys the cumulative effect of her carefully constructed interpretation. Fortunate those who can hear it completely! She sang the role twelve times that season, and followed it up with her Iris, thus establishing herself as one of the most important divas at La Scala for the next ten years. For the rest of Toscanini's reign there, till 1930, she was subsequently heard under his direction as Liu in "Turandot" (which was created by Maria Zamboni, but later taken on by Pampanini), Nedda in "I Pagliacci", "Manon Lescaut", Mimi in "La Bohème", Desdemona in "Otello", and Elsa in "Lohengrin". After 1930 her appearances continued with more performances of Mimi, Iris, Butterfly, Nedda and finally a new role: Maddalena in "Andrea Chenier" in 1937. Meanwhile she continued to appear in all the leading Italian opera houses, made a South American tour, during which she had the honour of creating Liu in "Turandot" for Rio de Janeiro (said to have been the first "Turandot" outside Italy), with Muzio and Lauri-Volpi, became a favourite in Monte Carlo, and sang three seasons, 1928, 1929 and 1933 at Covent Garden, where her repertoire was much larger than of most visiting prima donnas (Bohème, Pagliacci, Manon Lescaut, Turandot, Butterfly and Otello). Perhaps the pinnacle of her career was her

appearance in Berlin, when Toscanini crowned his second Scala period with a visit to Berlin with the whole company, in 1929. Pampanini was then chosen to appear as Manon Lescaut. Strangely enough the Metropolitan never seems to have considered her, but she did appear with the Chicago Civic Opera in 1931-32, where her Butterfly and Mimi were highly esteemed. In 1934 she added Tosca to her repertoire, which she curiously tested out in Oslo and Stockholm. After 1940 she seems to have considered branching out into the dramatic repertoire. On stage her boundaries were Tosca and Maddalena, and very occasionally Santuzza. However, about 1940 she made a series of rare recordings for Cetra which included arias from "Aida" and "Forza del Destino", two operas she did not sing on stage. A Tosca in 1942 is the latest I trace of her, but she seems to have sung until 1945, after which she devoted her time to teaching. She died in Milan, August 1st, 1973.

Her first records were for Fonotipia, after which her prime was devoted to Columbia, where she left us three complete operas: "Bohème", "Butterfly" and "Pagliacci". After a long interval came the final Cetra records. How strong her connection with Butterfly was is proven by the fact that she made three recordings of the love duet: on Fonotipia with Ciniselli, then an abridged version on Columbia with Merli, and finally the complete recording with Granda. Pampanini had a voice of many colours, and belongs to those artists who knew how to delineate a character by purely vocal means. This makes her Butterfly on disc the most fascinating one I know.

LEO RIEMENS.

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